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THE RAGTIMER

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UNDER YOUR HAT

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THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

is a non-profit corporation having the following objects;

To preserve classical ragtime music and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in classical ragtime music and music related thereto.

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1983

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Every so often, we urge readers to sit down and write an article for the Ragtimer. After all, where could you possibly find a group of individuals in the world who are more informed about the world of ragtime?

Jean Huling is one ragtimer who heard us, and we're grateful. You all will be after you read the heartwarming report in this issue of how Jean sought out information on Irene Giblin, an almost forgotten St. Louis ragtimer. Jean and her husband, Paul, also loaned us a dogeared copy -- their only one -- of Irene Giblin's "Sleepy Lou" so we make this a special Irene Giblin issue.

Jean went further by contacting Mrs. Giblin's granddaughter, Mrs. R.A. (Pat) Hutton of Chesterfield, Mo., for a picture. Thanks, Jean, for what we hope is the first of a series on women ragtimers!

We'll see you at the Bash.

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IRENE GIBLIN

RAGTIMER EXTRAORDINAIRE

LET'S REMEMBER IRENE GIBLIN!

By Jean Huling

Jean Huling and husband Paul, above, are a ragtime duo under the name of "Sister Jean: the Ragtime Queen and Laundry Fat", playing out of Madison, Ohio. They are popular favorites at the Ragtime Bash and other festivals.

Through a strange series of circumstances, I became acquainted with the family of Irene Giblin, a ragtime composer from St. Louis. They have provided me with their memories of her, as well as with all of her known compositions.

In 1982, while attending the St. Louis National Festival of Ragtime and Traditional Jazz, I purchased a rag from Janice Foland, the sheet music dealer at the festival. It was "Sleepy Lou" by Irene Giblin, and Janice mentioned that a teen-ager had looked at this same piece of music a week before, and said she was Irene's great-granddaughter.

"Would you like her telephone number?" Janice asked me. "I think I can still find it."

I was delighted that Janice did find the number. When I called, I found I was talking to the teen-ager's mother, Pat; she was Irene's granddaughter and remembered her well. Pat told me many things about her grandmother, and also got me in contact with Ed O'Brien, Irene's son.

Pat was glad that someone was taking an interest in her grandmother's compositions, because previously her family had mentioned to some unknown ragtime performer in St. Louis that they were related to Irene. This person told them Irene's rags were only "parlour music" and not worth his time.

However, Irene's rags are far more than parlour music. Their quality derives from the music's sprightly rhythms, unstereotyped melodies, and unusual breaks and stoptimes. They all combine to make her pieces fresh and appealing; one doesn't get bored practising them.

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Pat and her uncle Ed told me that Irene's early musical training consisted of only one year of piano lessons. Pat added that Irene had also received musical training in the parochial schools she attended; probably this was mostly vocal, Pat thought. Her job, after she finished school in St. Louis, was in the music department of a large St. Louis department store; Ed thought this store was "Stix, Baer and Fuller"! There, she was encouraged by many people to play the piano; by the store management, by the customers, and by Jerome Remick, who later published some of her rags. As new sheet music came into the store, Irene demonstrated it for the customers; it was this that inspired her to compose rags.

Son Ed wrote me, "She was an extremely talented pianist, and played all types of music extremely well -- but it was obvious that the ragtime type of music was her first love ... She wrote music at home and played some of her music in the store."

Irene worked until her second child (Ed), then became a housewife. But this didn't stop her music; both Ed and Pat told me how much joy she brought her family with her skill as a piano player.

"Although it wasn't her song," Ed wrote, "she loved 'Twelfth St. Rag' and played it beautifully until her last few years, when she was disturbed by the fact that her fingers weren't as nimble as before." After the death of Irene's husband, her joy in playing seemed to leave her, though she still enjoyed listening to all kinds of music.

Her legacy to us is nine rags. Ed said that her favorite was "Chicken Chowder", her first rag to be published. It came out in 1905, published by Remick. She called it a "Characteristic two-step", but put no tempo mark at the beginning. It is in ABACA form, with C similar to A in melody, but inverting the chromatic passage. B is a march-like section, showing the beginnings of Irene's gift for left-hand, tuba-like melodies.

In the next year, 1906, "Sleepy Lou" and "Soap-Suds" were published, also by Remick. "Sleepy Lou" is marked "Slow and drag"; it has an ABACB form; typical of Irene's later rags is this returning B form. The rag is notable because of interesting large skips as one melodic phrase moves to the next, creating almost an antiphonal effect.

"Soap-Suds", a two-step, uses an AABCD form, but D is really A transposed. Probably she repeated A so often because of its accented, left-hand octaves. The melodies in the C section alternate between a chromatic phrase and a lyrical phrase.

"Black Feather Two-Step" came out in 1908, dedicated to the Black Feather Club of St. Louis. I'm unsure what this Club was, but maybe they danced, for the rhythm of this piece is irresistible. The C section, especially, is a rhythmic jewel, with grace notes, hesitations on the third beat, and places where dancers could "dip". "Black Feather Two-Step" is the first rag not published by Remick but by Vinton.

Three rags were published in 1910, all by Remick: "Columbia", "Ketchup Rag", and "The Aviator Rag". "Columbia", like "Black Feather Two-Step", has a danceable rhythm; Irene marked the tempo as a slow drag. Neither A nor B are highly syncopated, but this B section has an interesting melodic alternation between chords and octave passages. The

C section has chromatic passages similar to the melodies in "Chicken Chowder", except that they appear simultaneously in BOTH hands, but at DIFFERENT speeds.

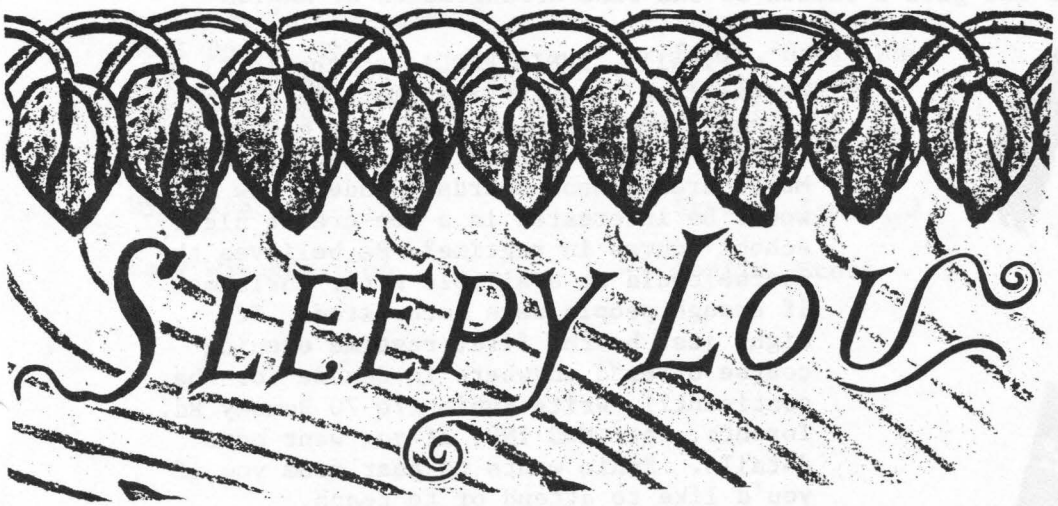
"The Aviator Rag" has an intro much like "Dill Pickles Rag". Unfortunately, when the family gave me the scores, one page of "The Aviator Rag" was lost, but it is a worthy two-step, using Irene's typical chromaticism. "Ketchup Rag" has a left hand passage that is a challenge to play accurately; it's an off-the-beat octave section appearing in the Trio.

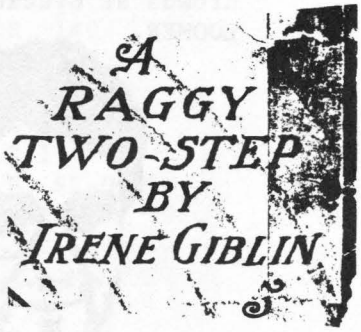
Irene's last two rags, "Pickaninny" and "The Dixie Rag", were published in 1913 by Sam Fox of Cleveland and Jos. M. Daly respectively. "Pickaninny" has a spirited melody in A and B sections, with the Trio in stoptime; the whole piece is an enthusiastic, toe-tapping dance. The syncopation here is in clusters, alternating with straight-time sections. The B part is somewhat similar in melody to "Sleepy Lou" (a happy reminiscence, since "Sleepy Lou"'s melodies are so fresh and fascinating.

"The Dixie Rag", a two-step, uses snatches of "Turkey in the Straw" and "Yankee Doodle" in the Trio, as does Charles Humfield's eclectic rag, "Who Let The Cows Out?" "Dixie" avoids sounding banal, however, because of unstereotyped melodies in A and B; not until the closing phrase does Irene use the familiar tune to "Dixie".

This summer's festival in St. Louis added a sequel to my information on Irene Giblin, when I met her family in person. While playing at a restaurant, I had just announced "Sleepy Lou" as my next number, giving some background information on Irene Giblin as a St. Louis composer. Before I could start the rag, a man ran up to the stage and handed us a note saying that a large group of Irene Giblin's family was present. (They had been in the audience quite awhile, hoping I would play one of Irene's rags) So, all of the restaurant's customers listened to Irene Giblin's rags, one right after the other, for the rest of the set.

While I was talking to Pat at intermission, she said, "Our family has not been an especially musical one, except for Grandmother, but we do have hopes." Then she told me about a 3-year-old descendant of Irene's who can already play the piano by ear. They're hoping he's inherited some of the talent for music that Irene had in such abundance.





SPECIAL THANKS to Mrs. Giblin's granddaughter, Mrs. R.A. Hutton of Chesterfield, Mo., for loaning us her only picture of her grandmother.

RAGTIME RUMBLES

BY BILL McCROSTIE
Vice-President
and Managing Director

See you at the Bash! Come up and say "hello".

Piano players check in early if you wish to play on Saturday. With the number of performers, it's getting more difficult to fit everyone in.

Those of you who received your scrolls no doubt admired the names which were done by member and calligrapher FRANK KAVANAGH. Another tip of the derby!

BOB DARCH, along with KFELL WALTMAN from Sweden and JEFF JORDAN from Omaha, were visitors in Toronto at the end of August. Bob leaves for Europe at the end of September.

The JAZZ AND BLUES RECORD STORE at 337 King Street West, Toronto, is moving to 66 Dundas Street East on Oct. 1st. At that time, the store will be owned by HAL HILL while upstairs at the same address long-time partners JOHN NORRIS and BILL SMITH will continue business -- John with his Sackville records and Bill with publishing Coda. All the best to John, Bill and Hal.

JOHN ARPIN has come back to Club 22 after his recent operation and had a large crowd present to welcome him back.

The RAINBOW GARDENS JAZZ ORCHESTRA with Ric Giorgi, bass, WILLIE WILSON, banjo and guitar, GORD VOGT on drums and vocals, JACK HUTTON, piano, AL BIRD, cornet, JOHN SANNEN, clarinet, and PAUL PACANOWSKI, baritone sax, is recreating the music of the 20's and 30's (particularly Bix Beiderbecke) each Friday and Saturday night at Gracie's, 508 Queen Street W. in Toronto. If you like the music of that era, join the crowds at Gracie's and give a listen to the fine arrangements of MARTIN LOOMER.

Finally, ENNIO PAOLA (at the left) has an exciting idea for ragtimers in the Metro Toronto area. Ennio, a Society member who is also a night school consultant with two Metro area school boards, wonders how many would be interested in a non-credit night school course in ragtime? He believes the course could be available after Christmas if enough people were interested. It might just be the first ragtime evening course offered anywhere in Canada (or the continent?) Write Ennio c/o 70 Rumsey Rd., Toronto, Ont. M4G 1N8, if you want more details. Ennio wants to hear from you if you'd like to attend or to teach.

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THE RAGTIME MAILBAG

Dear Friends,

I cannot tell you how thrilled I am about your serializing my Ragtime Guide in the Ragtimer. I believe it has found a rightful place and will serve all who play ragtime and have several folios. My only comment from hindsight is that the only worthwhile Charles Hansen folios are the ones by Dick Zimmerman and Ian Whitcomb. The rest of the pieces are in the other folios. A new address for Eastlake Music is 529 West 42nd Street, New York, N.Y., 10036.

I feel compelled to address the remarks of Reide Kaiser in the May/June, 1983, Ragtimer. Tex Wyndham reviewed the James P. Johnson Folkways LP in the November/December, 1974, issue of the Ragtimer. It is no doubt he found certain discrepancies in the LP, but not having the time or space he did not make any comments except that the performances were "up to Johnson's unparalleled standard of excellence."

I knew something was wrong the minute I played the LP and matched the titles with some of James's published scores. Through reading a review in CODA (by Tex) along with some comments by one of the most astute scholars of stride ragtime, John Simmen, I was able to glean the following information concerning THE ORIGINAL JAMES P. JOHNSON on Folkways FJ 2850.

Side One	Side Two
Daintiness Rag	Liza
Concerto Jazz-A-Mine (2nd mvmt.)	Aunt Hagar's Blues
Just Before Daybreak - take 1	Sweet Lorraine- Cliff Jackson
Just Before Daybreak - take 2	The Dream (a different take from the extra LP)
Jersey Sweet	Memphis Blues- Cliff Jackson
Jungle Drums	Euphonic Sounds (different take on Stinson SLP 21)
Snowy Morning Blues	St. Louis Blues
Twilight Rag	Sweet Lorraine

As of this year Dave has assembled 50 LP reissue of ragtime and jazz. They are THE source as to stylistic tendencies of the different pianists living during the ragtime era. They are extremely valuable documents as well as being entertaining. Anyone seeking to play ragtime and working for a style that has the feeling of the times and the people who knew what the style(s) were about needs the Herwin, Folkways and Paul Affeldt's Euphonic series of "The Professors" to play ragtime from the inside out.

This doesn't mean that good musicians cannot intuitively get the feeling of the music. Each Bash shows examples of young musicians playing the music for the first time with a feeling that shows involvement of the person with the music. Often we musicians use music as an extension of our ego and often perceptive auditors pick it up as well as other musicians.

There is also the joy of playing the music because it sounds nice. It makes the piano sound nice. This again is an involvement of the performer with the music and with the audience. The audience picks up on this immediately. Willie "The Lion" Smith wrote in his memoirs about playing to audiences who give "good vibrations".

Getting back to Jasen's LP reissues, I have found only two other LPs with liner and title mistakes. The Joe Sullivan LP, Folkways FA 2851, lists Blues in My Heart as being by Joe but it is by Benny Carter. On "Jazz Piano Greats", Folkways FJ 2852, Farewell to Riverside is played by Joe Sullivan, not Errol Garner.

I should also approach his work with assembling the fine piano roll LPs of Zez Confrey, Roy Barger, Max Kortlander and Charley Straight. Except on the first Confrey LP and the Bargy LP, I want to complain about two things: the pianos used and the speed of the rolls.

Most pianists dislike playing on an upright that is not in tune, regulated and voiced. Dave has made a fine case that the pianists who recorded on the acoustic discs of the teens and twenties and the early electric discs of the twenties, used an upright. Although the fidelity is dim on some of these 78 rpm recordings there is no doubt that the pianos were in tune. As examples, I refer to the acoustic discs of Zez Confrey on Brunswick and Roy Bargy on Victor.

What happens to the pianos used on the Kortlander and Straight LPs, with the exception of Tiddle de Winks on the Straight LP is that the pianos are not mechanically in as fine shape as Mike Montgomery's 65/88 note Steinway upright on the excellent Biograph series. So here is what happens. First, the music sounds muddy because the bass strings have not been changed since the piano came out of the factory over 50 years before. The reason for this is that dust accumulates in the copper wrapping and when the key is hit you get a "thud" instead of a "sprong". Secondly, they are played so fast you cannot feel the downbeat. Some of these rolls were marked with accents so you could pump harder and bring out syncopations as well as the downbeat. This would make the playing more expressive. Any of the recordings of the rag and jazz pianists show that use of accents was part of their way of playing from James P. Johnson to Frank Banta.

Another factor in the poor sound of old pianos is not having the hammers "voiced". The hammer "voicing" can make the difference between a bright, brilliant sound, a mellow sound or a mushy sound.

Although I love the Biograph series for their clarity, some of the James P. Johnson and Fats Waller roles could have gone a little faster for the "visceral" quality present in the fine LP transfers on Riverside do not always come through on the Biograph. But the Biograph issues have set a standard in quality of sound reproduction, quality of piano used and informative liner notes by which others should be judged.

I want to state that I am not putting down uprights as I have a 1909 Wing and a 1918 Gilbransen. When they are rebuilt, especially the quality ones like Weber, Chas. M. Stieff, A.B. Chase, Hardman, Steinway, to name a few, the sound will beat any upright piano on the market today unless it is a Yamaha or Steinway studio upright.

Sincerely yours,
Charles B. Davis Jr.

Dear Editor:

I was pleased to see that my letter has been published. I have already received one reply. My hunch on the recordings was correct and the mistake was noticed a few years ago by reviewers. Still, I am glad to know for certain the artist on these two cuts. If I receive anything interesting on the subject, I shall pass it along.

Sincerely,
Reide Kaiser

Sept. 6, 1983

Mr. John Arpin,
The Ragtime Society,
P.O. Box 520, Station A,
Weston, Ontario,
Canada M9N 3N3

Dear Mr. Arpin,

Thank you for your most gracious gift of $250.000 from the Ragtime Society to the AMAS Eubie Blake Children's Theatre.

The friendship and good will that the Ragtime Society has accorded us is worthy of our sincere gratitude. We appreciate your confidence in us and your fondness for Dr. and Mrs. Blake.

We sincerely hope that our service to the community and these children will continue to earn your support.

Again, we thank the Ragtime Society for its generosity.

Sincerely,
Rosetta LeNoire,
Founder and Artistic Director

Dear Ragtimer readers:

I can't tell you what a pleasure it is to see the letters flowing in. Don't hesitate to share your own contributions -- perhaps a request for help in finding a ragtime composition, thoughts about a local ragtime concert you've just seen, or your own views on the ragtime scene.

In case anyone is confused by the letters from Charlie Davis Jr. above and Reide Kaiser, Reide questioned in a recent issue (May/June) whether Cliff Jackson had been inadvertently left out of some liner notes attributing performances to James P. Johnson. He was right.

Keep the letters coming. As we keep saying in this space, this is YOUR publication!

Jack Hutton,
Editor, the Ragtimer

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OFFBEAT

THE RICHES OF RAGS

PETER CLAYTON

"SEEMS like a bit of a ragtime outfit if you ask me," my grandmother would say of anything which struck her as less than well organised.

So I was ten or twelve before I knew that "ragtime" was anything other than a synonym for unruly, untidy and incompetent. When, later on still, I finally heard real ragtime — precise, disciplined, deftly melodic — she was dead, and I never had the chance to ask her why people of her generation used the word only in a pejorative sense.

I think I know the answer. My grandmother would have been about 30 at the turn of the century. During the ensuing 15 years, ragtime, commercialised and garbled but recognisable nonetheless, was blown across the Atlantic by the trade winds of popular music. To anyone brought up on a bland diet of valetas and moonlight saunters some of the ragtime tunes must have been about as digestible as broken glass and dry bran. Those regularly syncopated rhythms, so quaintly square to us now, must have appeared convulsive and perhaps even menacing after decades of Viennese-inspired smoothness.

It was one of those periods in popular music when what was to outward appearances no more than a craze actually ushered in a permanent change; rock 'n' roll did it in the Fifties and electronics might be bringing about another long-term shift at this moment.

Plotting the progress of ragtime is bedevilled, of course, by the fact that the word itself became even more fashionable than the music, so that "rag" and "ragtime" were used as promiscuously as "jazz" was later on. That process no doubt aided the curious addition to my grandmother's vocabulary.

If you want to hear popular music capitulating to, absorbing, and amending, ragtime, then you should get hold of a double LP compiled by the French arm of RCA and called simply **Ragtime.** This has nothing to do with Joshua Rifkin being reverent about it in a boiled shirt, or with three-handed versions of Scott Joplin rattled out by a piano roll, or with the little New Orleans bands which included marches and rags in their repertoire as a matter of course. This is ragtime in its commercial manifestations mainly between 1900 and 1920, though the collection does struggle on to 1930.

Because Sousa's marches and the classic rags were very similar in construction, there are several earnestly jerky examples here by both Sousa's band and the band led by his one-time trombonist, Arthur Pryor. You will find a very authentic condensation of a minstrel troupe performance of a cakewalk medley in 1902, when minstrelsy was already in decline. The banjo virtuosos Vess Ossman and Fred Van Eps plunk nimbly away at fine numbers like "Buffalo Rag" and "Ragging The Scale," and someone called Chris Chapman obliges on an instrument described as a glass xylophone ("vitriphone" would surely have been permissible).

There are two items by the important black orchestra led by James Reese Europe. A band under his direction was a sensation when it came to Europe with the American forces in 1918, and is usually credited with accelerating the progress of American music on this side of the Atlantic. One of the James Europe numbers is particularly interesting—a pretty little tune called "You're Here And I'm Here." Jerome Kern wrote the melody at ten one morning, and by the same afternoon, Feb. 2 1914, the complete duet was being performed on stage. On the tenth, Jim Europe's Orchestra was in the studio setting down its version for a quick sale. We can still enjoy it 69 years later.

Dear Editor:

Re the clipping above: A friend who spends winters in the U.K. and likes to keep up with British news mentioned seeing this clipping. I promptly requested a copy, and it arrived in the mail shortly. I am forwarding it immediately (to the Ragtimer) before I lose it.

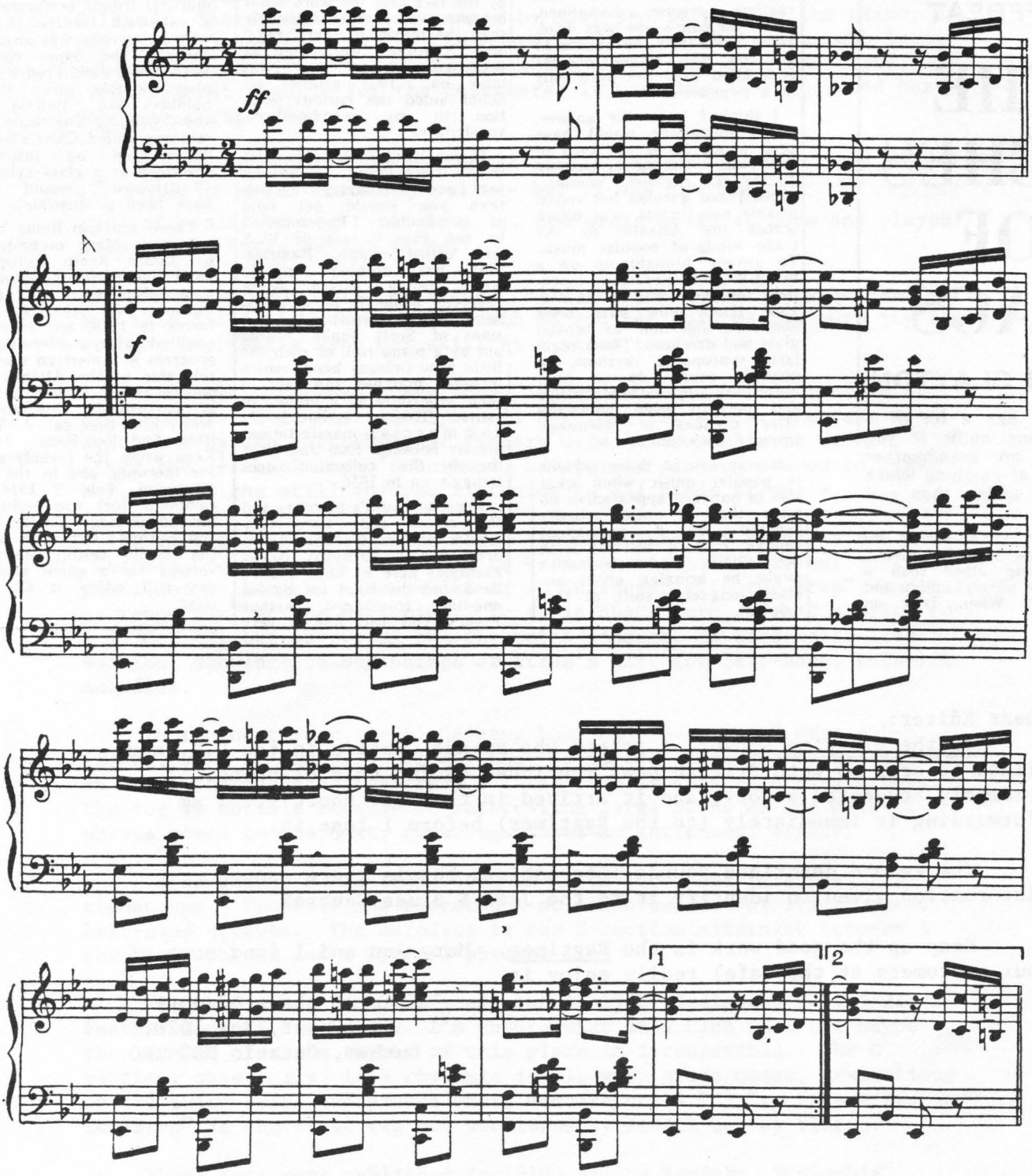
The record described sounds interesting, but is there enough information given to identify it to the Jazz & Blues Centre?

Keep up the good work in the Ragtimer. Mary Ann and I (and some of our customers at the cafe) really enjoy it.

Keep up the good work,
Bill West, Box 1028,
Durham, Ontario NOG 1RO

SLEEPY LOU.

Slow and Drag.

IRENE M. GIBLIN.

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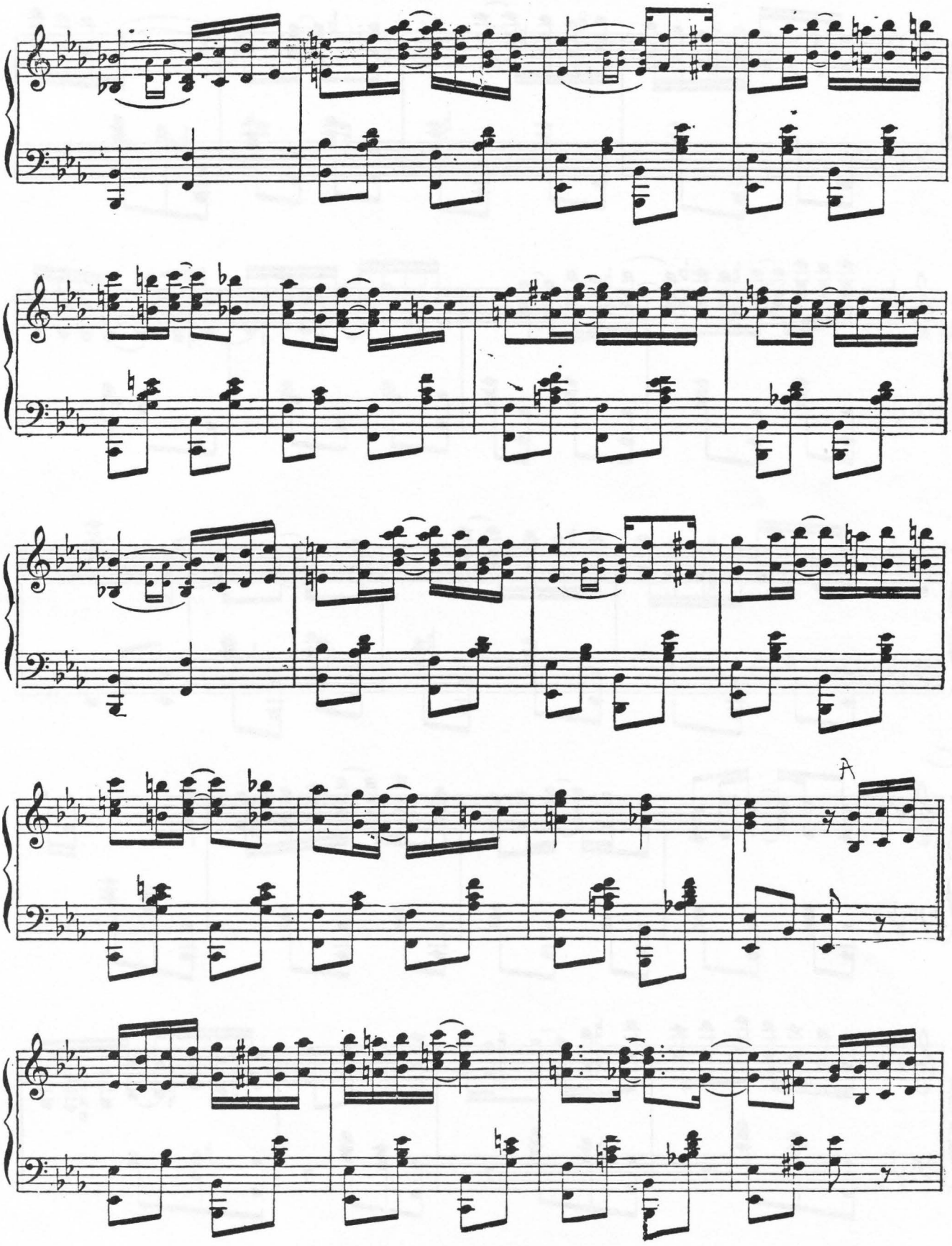
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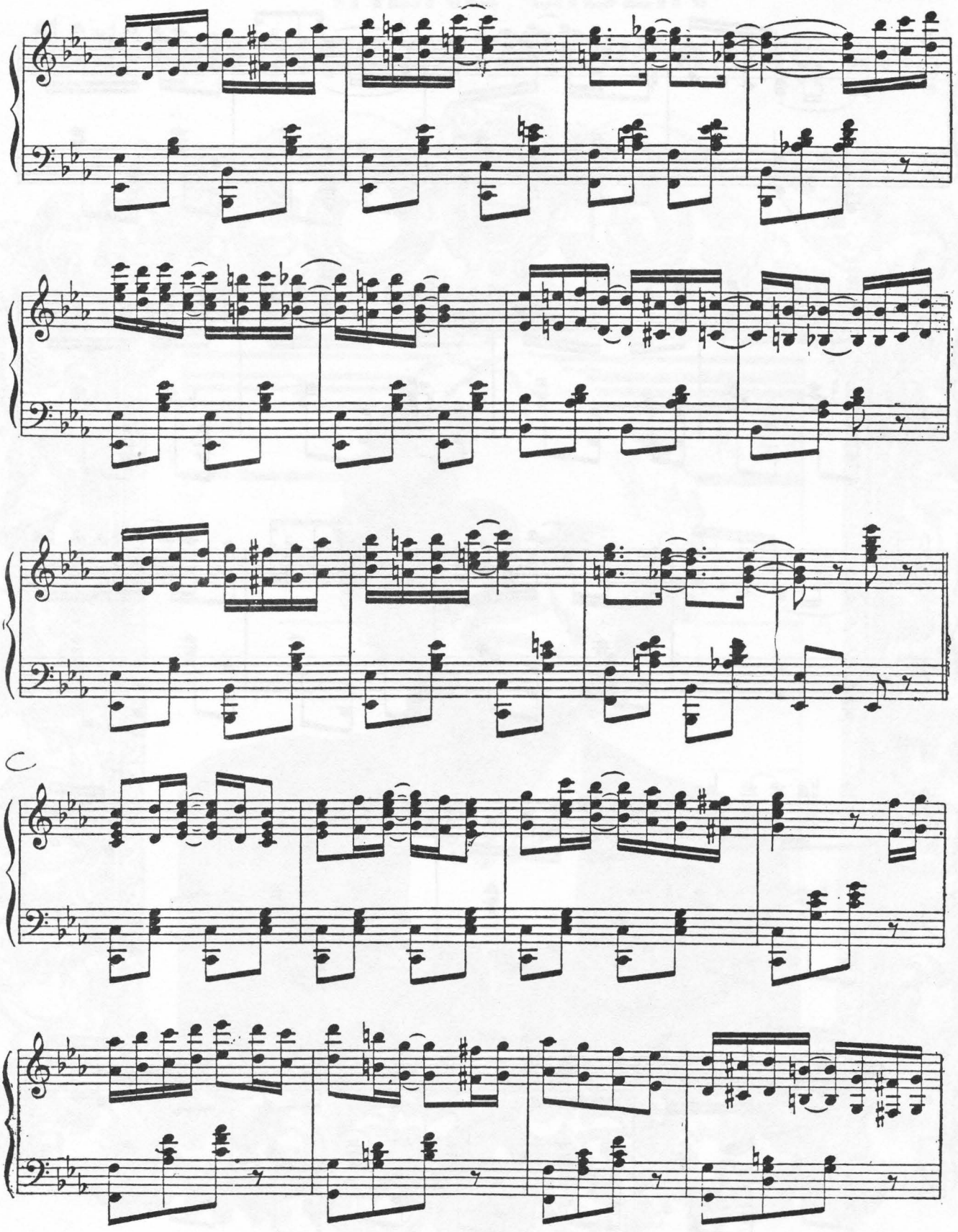
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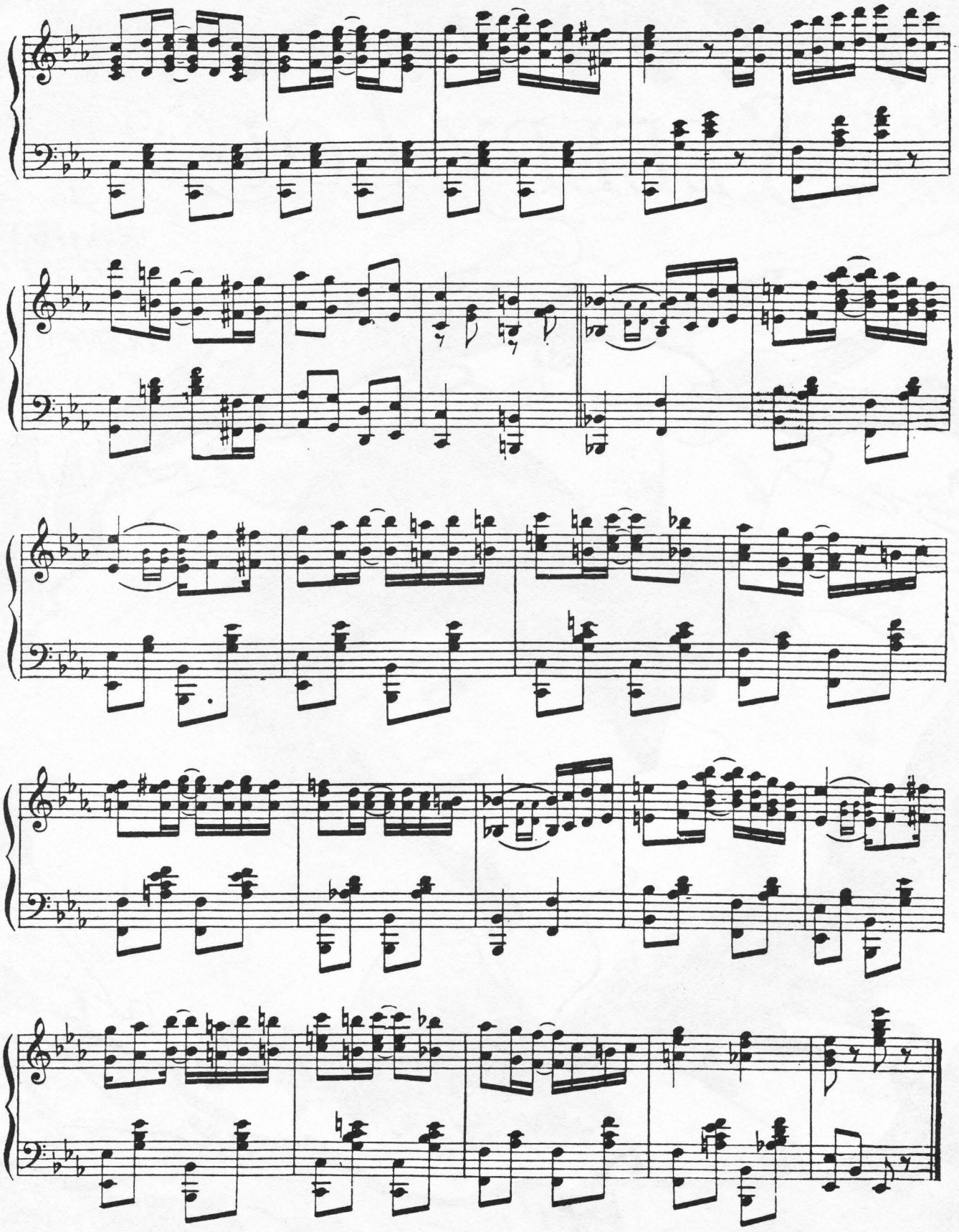
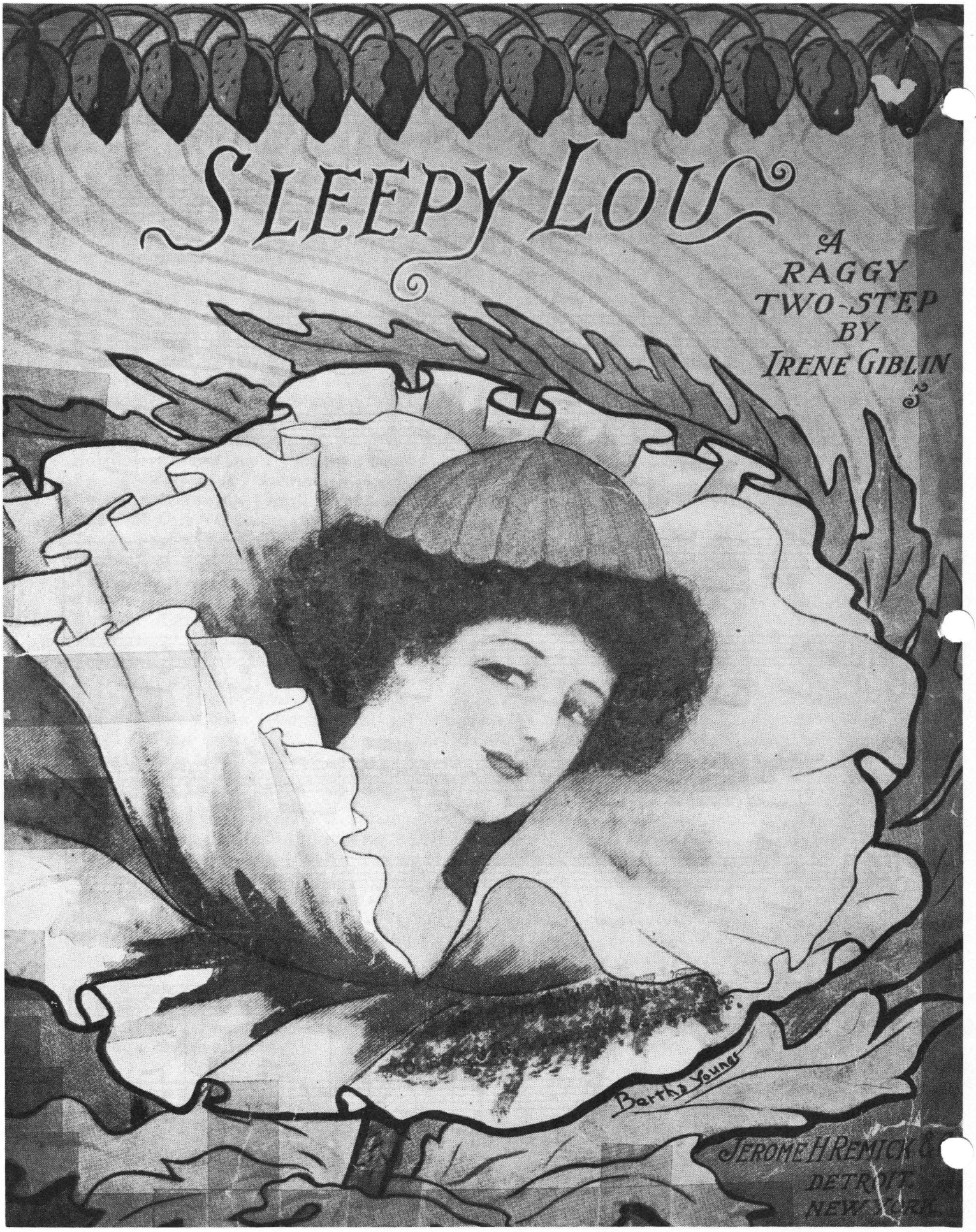
SLEEPY LOU
A RAGGY TWO-STEP
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